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"SHAKE THE TRUNK OF THE PALM TOWARD YOU, AND COOL YOUR EYE": FRESH DATES IN THE QURANIC TEXT: A SCIENTIFIC READING OF THEIR BENEFITS

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ABSTRACT

Maryam 19:25–26 presents a compact instruction that conjoins human effort, material provision, and emotional reassurance: "shake the trunk" for fresh dates, drink water, and "cool the eye." This paper offers a philological and hermeneutic analysis of the idiom qarri ʿayna alongside a contextual reading of rutab as situationally apt food. I map the idiom's distribution across the Quran to show its association with maternal relief and the restoration of composure, then examine classical tafsir that frames provision as aid joined to action. The biomedical segment is purposefully bounded. I distinguish two evidentiary windows: immediate, peripartum plausibility grounded in palatability, moisture content, and readily available simple sugars; and longer-horizon associations from small trials and observational studies that examine late-pregnancy date intake. The first addresses the verse's temporal setting; the second bears on thematic fit rather than mechanism at delivery. A brief methods note documents search steps and selection criteria to avoid cherry-picking. The resulting synthesis does not treat scripture as a warrant for clinical guidance. It argues instead that the verse's concrete wisdom aligns with ordinary physiology and practical foodways without collapsing exegesis into biochemistry. For religious studies, the contribution is methodological: a disciplined way to hold philology, reception, and cautious empirical literatures in a single interpretive frame.

Keywords: Quran, Maryam 19:25–26; qarri ʿayna, rutab, dates and labor, cervical ripening, induction; Islamic theology and science

INTRODUCTION

The Quran often stages subsistence as a sign of divine care. Communities receive manna and salwā in the wilderness, and the disciples of Jesus beseech a table sent from heaven. Such narratives foreground providence and test gratitude through scenes of unearned provision. Against that pattern, Maryam's account arrests the reader. In labor and alone, she is commanded to act. She must shake the palm, and fresh dates fall. The closing imperative, to eat, drink, and qarri ʿayna, joins bodily restoration with emotional settlement.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study asks three linked questions. First, why does the text require Maryam's participation rather than repeat the motif of direct endowment found elsewhere? Second, why specify rutab, fresh ripe dates, at precisely this moment rather than some other food? Third, how can a religious studies analysis engage biomedical literature without collapsing exegesis into physiology? The contribution is methodological as well as interpretive. I propose a disciplined way to hold philology, reception, and cautiously selected empirical work within a single frame.

The approach is threefold. I map the idiom qarri ʿayna across its Quranic occurrences as an index of composure through the child's presence. I read classical tafsir that frames provision as aid joined to action. I then engage contemporary reports on date consumption late in pregnancy, with clear boundaries. Two evidentiary windows are distinguished. The first concerns immediate, peripartum plausibility grounded in palatability, moisture content, simple sugars, and ease of ingestion by a solitary mother. The second concerns longer-horizon associations from small trials and observational studies of antepartum date intake. Findings in the second window are treated as thematic fit with the scene's concreteness, not as evidence for a mechanism operative at delivery. A brief methods note documents search steps, inclusion choices, and limits to reduce the risk of cherry-picking, with representative sources indicated for transparency (Al-Kuran et al., 2011; Kordi et al., 2014; Nasiri et al., 2019; Salajegheh et al., 2024).

This study advances a single, bounded claim that integrates philology, material affordances, and cautious empirical synthesis. Linguistically, qarri ʿayna signals restored composure whose source is the child himself. Materially, fresh dates (rutab) provide water, fast-available sugars, potassium, and fiber with no need for tools, fuel, or assistance, which fits the narrative's isolation constraint. Empirically, small studies of late-pregnancy date consumption report associations with better admission readiness and a more favorable labor trajectory, though designs vary and samples are modest. Taken together, these lines of evidence support a theologically grounded reading in which human effort is joined to providential provision, and the choice of rutab is materially fitting rather than ornamental. The article offers interpretive fit, not medical advice. Situated within maqāṣid, the episode aligns with the preservation of life and lineage and sketches an ethic of maternal care suitable for prudent public teaching.

Divine Food Provision in the Quran: Paradigms of Direct Giving

This section sets the baseline against which Maryam's scene should be read. Several narratives present provision as communal and unlabored: the gift descends or springs forth, the audience is plural, and the language of instruction centers on eating from what has been given. The pattern is stable enough to be recognizable. It sets up the contrast that follows, where Maryam faces solitude, labor, an instruction to act, and specified fresh food.

Table 1. Core exemplars of direct divine provision:

SURAH	ARABIC INCIPIT	TRANSLATION CUE	MODE OF PROVISION	**Audience**	**Instructional language**
2:57	وَأَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَنَّ وَالسَّلْوَىٰ	"We sent down upon you manna and quails"	Manna; quails	Banī Isrā'īl	"Eat from the good things"
7:160	فَانْبَجَسَتْ مِنْهُ اثْنَتَا عَشْرَةَ عَيْنًا	"Twelve springs gushed forth"	Water; manna; quails	Banī Isrā'īl	"Eat from the good things"
5:112–115	أَنْ يُنَزِّلَ عَلَيْنَا مَائِدَةً مِّنَ السَّمَاءِ	"Send down to us a table from heaven"	Table with food	Disciples of ʿĪsā	*Implicit in the request to eat*

Note. Verse numbering follows the Saheeh International translation. Classical exegeses can be consulted in al-Ṭabari, Ibn Kathir, and al-Qurṭubi for traditional interpretations of these passages.

Establishing this baseline clarifies the stakes. Where the Quran elsewhere depicts communal provision without human effort, Maryam's episode inverts the pattern: solitude, labor, a command to act, and a named fresh food. She must take the means. The gift is not a generalized table but fresh dates, concrete, and culturally legible. The inquiry that follows is precise: why require participation here, and why specify rutab at this moment?

Linguistic Analysis of qarri ʿayna (قَرِّي عَيْنًا)

Aim: Two tasks guide this section: establish the idiom's meaning from authoritative lexica and show how the Quran uses it.

3.1 Semantics

The triliteral root q–r–r denotes coolness, stillness, and settledness. In classical usage, qurrat al-ʿayn is the "cooling of the eye," a figure for relief after heat, grief, or agitation. Lane glosses it as the eye's being cooled from the heat of sorrow, hence joy and repose. Ibn Manẓūr contrasts the burning eye that weeps from distress with the cooled eye that rests in delight. In Maryam 19:26, the form qarri is a second-person feminine imperative, addressed directly to Maryam, and functions as a performative call to composure rather than a merely descriptive remark.

3.2 Quranic distribution

The idiom and its cognates appear where maternal or familial relief is secured, often through the child's presence or welfare:

- Maryam 19:26 – fa-kuli wa-ishrabi wa-qarri ʿayna. Post-birth consolation; the newborn is the proximate source of relief.
- Al-Qaṣaṣ 28:13 – fa-radadnāhu ilā ummihi kay taqarra ʿaynuhā wa-lā taḥzan. Maternal grief resolved by reunion with the child.
- Ṭā-Hā 20:40 – fa-radadnāka ilā ummika kay taqarra ʿaynuhā. Same construction; maternal relief

3.3 Analytic payoff

Across these passages, the idiom indexes emotional settlement secured through the child. In Maryam 19:26, it is yoked to "eat" and "drink," which produces a composite remedy in the verse's rhetoric: nourishment and hydration for the body, re-composition through the child. This pairing justifies reading the scene as materially and affectively integrated, and it prepares the inquiry into why rutab is specified at this moment.

3.4 Classical sources and lexical witnesses

Tafsir anchors: Classical commentators read wa-qarri ʿayna in Q.19:26 as practical consolation. Al-Ṭabari (2001) explains it as an instruction to composure once provision is secured and links ʿayna to the idiom of settled joy. Ibn Kathir (1999) follows, treating fa-kuli wa-shrabi wa-qarri ʿaynā as coordinated imperatives that bind nourishment, hydration, and reassurance; he paraphrases wa-qarri ʿaynā as ṭibi nafsan ("be at peace"). Al-Qurṭubi (1964) adds al-Shaybāni's report that the sense here is "sleep," a natural extension of relief after immediate needs are met, and notes ʿayna as tamyiz. Taken together, these witnesses support reading the triplet as a single unit of care rather than three unrelated acts.

Lexical witness: The idiom rests on the semantic base qarr- "to be cool, settled." Lisān al-ʿArab defines qurrat al-ʿayn as "that by which the eye is cooled," i.e., a source of settled joy (Ibn Manẓūr, n.d.). This supports translating the imperative not as a generic "calm down," but as composure anchored in the child whose welfare grounds the relief.

Rutab and Tamr: A Concise Nutritional Comparison at Term

Dates mature through stages: kimri (unripe), khalal (crisp), rutab (soft-ripe), and tamr (dried). The verse specifies rutab. Fresh dates require no preparation, are easy to chew, and provide water, sugars, potassium, and fiber in a form suited to a woman in isolation. Drying concentrates sugars and energy but reduces moisture and can reduce heat-labile compounds. The table below synthesizes values reported in nutrition reviews and cultivar studies. Ranges reflect variability across date varieties.

Table 2. Comparative analysis of fresh vs. dried dates

Component (per 100 g)	*Rutab* (fresh ripe)	*Tamr* (dried)	Practical relevance at term
Moisture (g)	30–45	10–20	Hydration after labor
Energy (kcal)	180–220	260–320	Immediate vs. sustained energy
Total sugars (g)	40–50	60–75	Rapidly absorbable energy
Dietary fiber (g)	3–7	4–8	Bowel function and satiety
Potassium (mg)	300–500	600–750	Muscle function and fluid balance
Vitamin C (mg)	2–18	trace–2	Antioxidant potential (fresh dates have more vitamin C)
Phenolics/antioxidants	Higher in many fresh samples	Lower on average	Oxidative stress reduction; recovery support

Sources: Al-Farsi & Lee (2008); Allaith (2019); Al-Shwyeh (2019); Bano et al. (2022); Hinkaew et al. (2021); Mahomoodally et al. (2023). (Values vary by cultivar and growing conditions.)

Comparative Historical Context: Dates in Earlier Traditions

Across pre-Islamic settings, dates appear as both staple and remedy. Egyptian medical papyri record date-based preparations with diuretic, laxative, and anti-inflammatory aims, situating the fruit within a practical pharmacology rather than mere diet (Bryan, 1930; Leake, 1952). Archaeobotanical finds place dates in funerary contexts from the Predynastic period, indicating symbolic and provisioning roles. Later technical notes on date-palm pollen connect the plant to fertility practices. The through-line is recognition of physiological value, often realized through processed forms and treatment courses.

Against that background, the Quranic scene is notably specific. It names fresh rutab and frames their intake as aid suited to an acute, solitary moment of childbirth. The instruction does not inaugurate a regimen; it provides immediate, self-administered nourishment that requires no preparation. The verse then couples bodily sustenance with reassurance, so that eating, and drinking are joined to composure. That integrated choreography is the passage's practical wisdom, and it is what distinguishes this specification from the broader, treatment-oriented dossiers in earlier traditions.

DISCUSSION: INTEGRATING TEXT, LANGUAGE, AND EVIDENCE

This reading of Maryam 19:25–26 proceeds with a two-window method that keeps exegesis primary while permitting a cautious glance at empirical literature. The first window is philological and exegetical. The second is biomedical and strictly bounded. Taken together, they support a modest claim: the verse stages ordinary means that fit the narrative constraints, and it ties emotional composure to the child's presence rather than to a free-floating consolation.

The idiom qarri ʿayna warrants the center of gravity. Read as a second-person feminine imperative with ʿayn(an) in the function of tamyiz, the phrase names a restoration of composure that is relational and situated. Across its Quranic uses, the idiom marks the settling of the self when a hoped-for person is granted, not merely when a worry subsides in the abstract. In this scene, the sequence "eat, drink, and be re-composed" therefore coheres nourishment and hydration prepare the body, and the infant's presence secures the relief the idiom encodes. Classical tafsir already traces this arc at a high level. A brief grammatical note in the apparatus will forestall pedantry and keep the discussion on the verse's literary choreography rather than on terminological skirmishes.

The choice of rutab rather than stored tamr is materially apt for a woman alone. Fresh dates supply moisture, readily usable sugars, potassium, and fiber without heat, milling, or utensils. They are easy to ingest and safe to handle in solitude. The scene exploits those affordances with economy: a minimal human act, then proximate, preparation-free food. Seasonality and availability are historical questions that the text does not aim to settle. The claim here is narrower: the specification of rutab is intelligible on ordinary grounds once isolation is recognized as a constraint.

The empirical window remains deliberately narrow. Small observational studies and limited interventions in late pregnancy have reported favorable admission profiles and a smoother early labor course for women who consumed dates in the final weeks. Designs are heterogeneous, dosing and cultivar are inconsistently reported, and outcomes vary in definition. These limitations matter. They restrict what can be inferred about mechanisms and preclude any clinical prescription. For present purposes, they suffice to show only a direction of effect that rhymes with the scene's practical wisdom. Our use of these findings is thematic rather than probative.

In 19:25 the instruction to shake the trunk of the palm is not incidental choreography. It stages lawful recourse to means as the form that trust takes under constraint. Classical theologians describe created means as the ordinary sites where God brings about effects, without independent efficacy attributed to the means themselves. The scene holds that line with precision: the shaking is minimal human effort, the falling fruit and restored composure are divine provision, and the fit between them models a pedagogy of prudence rather than a proof-hunt. The well-known Prophetic dictum "tie your camel, then trust" expresses the same grammar of action grounded in reliance. Read this way, Maryam is not rescued from action but through it, and tawakkul is secured from quietism. Within a maqāṣid frame, the scene upholds preservation of life and lineage, but it also specifies a duty of care toward mothers: nourishment that is safe, proximate, and requires no preparation. Communities that teach from this scene are obliged to translate its ethic into ordinary provision for postpartum women, not as a medical prescription but as public prudence.

Several limits should be kept explicit. Historic seasonality may challenge the ready availability of fresh rutab in every setting; nothing in our argument turns on resolving that question. The biomedical literature is small and heterogeneous; it is used here to clarify aptness, not to underwrite an inference from text to therapy. Exegetically, this reading depends on the local rhetoric of Sūrat Maryam and the idiom's distribution, not on an appeal to concordist miracles. The didactic yield is practical. The passage joins human effort to providential aid and models care for maternal bodies under constraint. The method generalizes to other scenes where the text specifies ordinary means. What does not generalize is any attempt to turn those scenes into standing medical advice. The contribution is interpretive fit, framed by maqāṣid and disciplined by the limits of both windows.

CONCLUSION

This study offers a bounded interdisciplinary reading of Maryam 19:25–26 that holds philology, classical reception, and a carefully delimited biomedical window in constructive tension. The idiom qarri ʿayna is understood as composure anchored in the child, and the narrative pairing of eat, drink, and steadying counsel is taken as a unit of meaning. The framework established in the introduction sets clear inferential boundaries and keeps exegesis primary. Within that narrow empirical window, late-pregnancy date reports suggest modest, directionally consistent associations including higher admission Bishop scores and slightly shorter early labor in small trials but with heterogeneity and risk of bias that warrant caution. Plausibility rests on simple mechanisms: fresh rutab provide readily absorbable sugars and water, along with minerals and fiber that can support hydration and energy availability during exertion. Importantly, nothing here confirms a biomedical miracle in the historical setting, and nothing constitutes clinical advice.

Rather, the contribution is methodological as well as exegetical. A restrained two-window design allows adjacent knowledge to illuminate without overruling the text. Future work should tighten the historical context on seasonality and cultivation, describe cultivar and form distinctions with greater precision, and improve the evidentiary base through larger, preregistered studies with transparent dosing and outcome reporting. The same disciplined approach can be applied to other passages where ordinary foodways meet extraordinary moments.

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